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U.S. Navy photo by Javier Chagoya

Past Navy League Winner Returns to Present Winter Quarter's Award

By Javier Chagoya

NPS alumnus, retired Lt. Cmdr. Tom Winant, President of the Pacific Central Region, Navy League of the United States, right, and Winter quarter graduate Cmdr. Erik Lavoie, left, share an achievement in common albeit separated by nearly 50 years.

In 1970, Winant was selected as the recipient of the Navy League's Award for Greatest Academic Achievement when he was a student in the NPS Department of Operations Research. Winant returned to NPS to present this quarter's award, now coined the Navy League Award for Highest Academic Achievement, to Lavoie.

Humble in all manners, Winant said it was pure luck that he made it to NPS at all.

"I had just finished my tour in Vietnam and the fellow at the assignment desk was generous enough to share information about a billet I could take at the P.G. school, besides the many ships that I could also be sent to at the time," recalled Winant.

Just prior to the awards ceremony, Winant showed Lavoie the memento given to him 47 years before ... A cigarette box with an inscription on a brass plate extolling Winant's "most improved status in consideration of his educational background and the level at which he matriculated, regardless of program."

"To me, the [Navy League] award represents hard work in an outstanding academic institution, and it meant a lot. I've always thought of it with this phrase, 'It's not for how high you stand, but for how far you've climbed,'" Winant said.

As for Lavoie, he has flown hundreds of hours of counter drug missions, attended the Naval War College as a senior lieutenant, and served as a Reserve Center commander. And even with all of his accomplishments and hard work before arriving, Lavoie was looking forward to taking full advantage of his opportunity at NPS.

"I'm an aviator, following in my dad's footsteps. He was an Air Force National Guard pilot. Unfortunately, my father died in an airplane crash when I was six," said Lavoie. "I grew up in New England. Later our family made its way to Florida where I eventually attended Jacksonville University. I joined the Navy and flew E-2C Hawkeyes and later taught at the Navy's Air Controller School.

"I came here as a fairly senior lieutenant commander, commander select, not knowing if I had five or ten years in my Navy career to give back," continued Lavoie. "I also came with the purpose of learning, and going above and beyond academically, to grasp everything I was being taught because I was keenly aware of the valuable opportunity I was given to come to NPS."

In addition to the Navy League award, Lavoie is also the recipient of the Network Operations and Technology Outstanding Graduate Award given by the Graduate School of Operational and Information Sciences. He will join his fellow soon-to-be graduates in the culmination of their studies at NPS during the Winter Quarter Graduation Ceremony, Friday, March 31, at 10:00 a.m. in King Auditorium.

3/27/17

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